public hearings

NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF

TRANSPORTATION

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POLICY

To insure that the public has adequate opportunity to acquire advance and first-hand knowledge of proposed highway alignments as well as major improvements to existing highways, the New Jersey Department of Transportation has, over a period of years, held public hearings to review such projects prior to plans being put into final form. Such hearings also make available to the Department the interests and the point of view of the residents of affected areas.

FEDERAL ACT

As part of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, public hearings were made a requirement in most situations where Federal funds were involved and new right-of-way was to be acquired or where changes planned in existing highways might affect nearby property owners. It was required that the hearing be open to the public and held at a time and place convenient to the area to be served, (or certification be made to the Federal Bureau of Public Roads that the public was offered the opportunity to attend a hearing), and when held, transcripts to be furnished to the Bureau of Public Roads.

COMPLIANCE

The Department acts not only in complete conformance with the Federal requirements, but goes even further to insure that the intent of the law is met. Long before a public hearing is scheduled for a major improvement, conferences are held between local officials and Department engineers to obtain "on-the-spot" knowledge of local needs.

CONFERENCES

Upon formulation of tentative alignments or improvements involving major projects, the Commissioner or his representative, or the State Highway Engineer holds further conferences with local officials. Only following such conferences and the consideration of pertinent suggestions in the planning is the project moved to the public hearing stage.

HEARING LIMITS

The geographical area to be covered by a public hearing is usually dependent upon the extent of the proposed project. A new interchange proposal would probably be of interest to the residents of only a single municipality A major project, however, such as establishing alignment for a new Interstate route, would probably involve distances through several counties. In such a situation, it is necessary that the hearing limits include the longest portion of alignment possible, commensurate with the convenience of the public that might reasonably be expected to attend.

WHY

Engineering factors that dictate the most feasible alignment possibilities seldom coincide with or contain themselves within a municipal boundary. Hence, a proposal within one community almost always is directly related to factors occurring within neighboring communities. Conversely, a proposal to modify within one community is almost certain to require modifications in another, or even several others. Such hearings usually cover alignment through an entire county, or

the points nearest county lines where inter-dependence in design factors is least.

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PLACE

Once the scope of the hearing has been determined, a suitable and convenient place in which to hold it is selected. Principal factors in this determination are the number of persons expected to attend and geographical relationship of the site to the proposed project. In order to conform the meeting facilities to the need, meeting places have ranged from full sized theatres on a rental basis to gratis use of relatively small municipal council chambers. In each instance, however, the facility utilized was "tailored" to fit the occasion.

NOTICE

After the time and place of the hearing have been determined, all municipal, county and state officials of the affected area are notified by letter of the proposed hearing and advertisements announcing time, date and place inserted in newspapers of the county in which the hearing will be held. News releases describing the proposals and sketches of the project, suitable for reproduction, are sent to all newspapers and radio stations serving the area. This action takes place at least 30 days in advance of the scheduled hearing.

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CONDUCT

The hearing is customarily conducted by the Bureau of Route Location, Division of Planning, or the Bureau of Road Design, Division of Design, whose engineers

are familiar with the project plans. In the case of extremelv large projects, the State Highway Engineer may preside at the hearing. The very purpose of the hearing requires it be held before all details of the final plans are developed.

PRECEDENCE

Following a complete description of the project's basic design features, augmented by the use of drawings and aerial photographs, the presiding officer calls upon all public officials for their expressions. Representatives of local organizations are then called upon to speak, followed by individual interested residents of the municipalities affected. Individuals are required to audibly identify themselves, and if representing an organization or group, to so state when asking a question or addressing the hearing.

THE RECORD

All proceedings are tape recorded and typewritten transcriptions are furnished the Department and the Federal Bureau of Public Roads. These records are also used in reviewing points brought forth at the hearing.

POST – HEARING

Following the public hearing, State and Federal engineers and administrators relate to the project the effect of new information and practical suggestions advanced at the hearing. Frequently additional conferences between Department engineers and local officials are held and original planning reviewed to consider possible feasible changes in the local community interest before final

plans are prepared and construction scheduled.

FORECASTS

Although the Department would much prefer to be able to announce at the public hearing when right-of-way purchase could begin and construction start and be completed, only in extremely rare instances can any of the three be forecast with any degree of certainty. Hearing reviews may require weeks or even months, and progress in production of detailed drawings for the projects depends largely upon the engineering problems that arise. Right-of-way purchase and construction schedules hinge upon the availability of Federal and State funds and consideration of local and area needs to the extent compatible with engineering cost and all essential factors.

PARTICIPATION

We welcome attendance at our public hearings.

A sincere and reasonable objection, asking questions with an open mind, or simply putting oneself on record in favor of or opposed to a proposal, will be a contribution toward making certain the project's final design will have had the benefit of analysis by the citizenry of the area.

And that, precisely, is the purpose of holding public hearings.

September 1967